

Postmodern Urbanization: The Six Restructurings of Los Angeles Summary

In Edward Soja's article *Postmodern Urbanization: The Six Restructurings of Los Angeles*, He examines a series of Geographies that serve as observations on an evolving phenomenon that is rapidly changing to the point of being almost unable to define a clear and stable model of development for what he has dubbed as a *postmodern urbanization process*. Soja states that "In the postmodern city the modern city has not disappeared" but "Its presence may be diminished". He further describes the postmodern city as an almost organic life form that grows and develops with a "its own dynamic of change".

This statement leads the reader into a realm where one will ponder "what is the force behind this dynamic?" The answer is given in Soja's *first geography*. He states that the postmodern city is fueled by a restructured economic base where the Centralized Business District is undergoing "fundamental changes in organization and technology" and that postmodern urbanization is more influenced by the changing social aspects of its present populations and therefore subject to change as those aspects evolve. Soja alludes to such aspects such as quality of life, as he gives the example of the transition from "Rustbelt to Sunbelt" and the development of "technopoles" and other concentrations of tech based industry in areas that were once agricultural zones. Therefore, eliminating the urban looking aspect and providing a new horizon for potential homeowners as these industries flourish.

Although, the need for a CBD is still necessary to maintain the financial structure,

the focus on Fordist manufacturing era has taken a backseat to the influence of globalization as it supplies products and services to more than the outer limits of the older models of urbanization. In the Post-Fordist era, capital is generated by a “more flexible production system” and such industries such as Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (the FIRE sector). The latter is highly influenced by globalization as it is poised to obtain both domestic and international revenue as well as obtain a great deal of its labor from abroad. An example of this would be the stereotypical Indian call center. While outsourcing low skill labor to other countries, a FIRE sector corporation would appear to reserve the majority of its professional labor to be employed domestically, while providing employment on an international scale and cutting labor costs simultaneously.

The aspect of this process that is overlooked in Soja’s description is that while a FIRE sector corporation employs the majority of its professional labor domestically, the median income of a postmodern Centralized Business District such as this (although appearing as a medium to small sized business due to the lack of low skill domestic employment on premises) would be much higher and therefore create a financially inaccessible environment to citizens that were not “professional labor”. As incomes rise, so do housing costs as well as the services, products, and demands of what the average professional employee demands, while further perpetuating the urbanization of suburbia.

In Soja’s *second geography*, he addresses Los Angeles’ influx of foreign born citizens and the effects of world cities upon a population. Ultimately, a world city is steeped in the realm and practice of globalization and sets the president for the development of what Soja calls a Global Bourgeoisie and Global Proletariat. As mentioned prior, the restructuring of an economic base dismantles the highly organized

(and concentrated) labor organizations that regulated the wage scale and safety of the employee. When the industrial era fell victim to the free trade of globalization, the workforce and economy began to shift to a focus that entailed seeking out unorganized labor that would work for wages and benefits that are less than union scale. By focusing on the large scale foreign born population, Soja sites this workforce as a viable force in the economic prosperity of Los Angeles. Which should be no surprise, regardless of how new and unfamiliar this concept seems. If one examines the influx of Italian and Polish labor into the workforce of the early 1900's, this phenomenon has been well established since the inception of the American labor pool. However, the incoming populations are not European, which may seem more than foreign to the existing Anglo culture, and the entire world has changed with technology and globalization; so in essence it is the same phenomenon but in an entirely different context.

Another aspect of this geography is a phenomenon of 'glocalization'. It is where the local becomes globalized and the global becomes localized. The context of this phenomenon is not fleshed out in its entirety but its applications are numerous. One specific context could be the global distribution of a locally grown/produced product or service that would have struggled to find a market sans the instrument of globalization. In the same direction one could reference the outsourcing of labor in the FIRE sector. On the flipside, one must recognize the growing number of corporate chains and products that find their way into our lives.

In my opinion, the most fascinating aspect of this entire excerpt is the *fifth geography*. Soja's fifth geography observes that the postmodern city has become extremely complex and "increasingly ungovernable". Therefore, giving way for the need

for mega prisons, constant surveillance, and extreme home security measures to ensure the safety of its population. Not only is this concept a means to lock criminals up, it is also a means of voluntary imprisonment for personal safety. Lock your car, key card entry in the workplace, home security systems, panic rooms, and fences. Almost all middle class recreational activities have been moved into discreet areas that are generally behind the house, obscured by fences and thousands of dollars worth of plant material. For what? So the neighbors can't see our corn hole game? Or how we grill brats? This portion of the excerpt has made me aware of an increased paranoia that is growing within the context of the populous, which has to be fantastic for the businesses that sell/manufacture/install these products. Essentially, this paranoia will inevitably be exploited to fuel commerce and shape the landscape of the postmodern urban realm (it has not already been done).

Soja's *sixth geography* explores the concept of social control and social transformation. This is where the evolution of the social aspect can shape the world in which it resides, and as it changes so can the demands and desires of its citizens. It involves re-imagining the urban landscape concept whether through the influence of popular media or the rejection of such imagery. It seems to stem from the broad refutation that our society is more than just the remnants of a post industrial society that crumbled under the influence of globalization and is left with the permanent debris of the prior infrastructure. The desire to rehabilitate and create new is too strong to be ignored.

This excerpt appears to be written in the mid 1990's. While reading, I was often intrigued as to if the process of change and restructuring had taken full effect or was this

the beginning phases of a transitional/Post-NAFTA convergence. A few of the concepts seemed to lack the clarity needed to make a true judgment as to what the actual restructuring was affecting. For example, the third geography states that it is a “combination of decentralization and recentralization, the peripheralization of the center and the centralization of the periphery, the city simultaneously being turned inside out and outside in”. I cannot make heads or tails from this statement. Is Soja talking about the exburbs and edge cities becoming urbanized while gentrification happens in their old residences? Or simply the urbanization of suburbia? Overall, a good article. Lots of insight to the changing urban structure that Los Angeles and its ultimate influence as a model for other postmodern cities.

